

A Parallel Case

A Story Where Truth Proves Stranger Than Fiction

By AGNES C. BROGAN

The big westerner was evidently not enjoying his journey. He appeared to be possessed of a hunger for human companionship, and after several unsuccessful attempts at conversation with fellow passengers in the smoker he stepped out on to the observation platform and stood drawing long breaths of fresh air, as though the proximity of the trees along the way-side stirred him. Then, turning abruptly, he entered the car. His occupants still sat absorbed in their own affairs as his towering figure passed down the aisle. Then as Boynton sank into his seat his glance fell upon a girl who sat opposite. He had not noticed her before, but now his bored expression gave way to one of frank pleasure as he gazed admiringly into her charming upturned face.

There was an indefinable air of joyousness about the girl which curved the corners of her lips and twinkled in her laughing eyes. She regarded the westerner with good-humored interest for a moment, then returned to her survey of the ever-changing scenery. But to the man her very presence had changed the dreary atmosphere like a breath from the sweet, wild prairies. He saw as he covertly watched the girl her unaffected delight in the new surroundings and was possessed of a sympathetic desire to enjoy with her this passing panorama. He longed to tell of the wide-reaching lands of his own beloved country and the deep purple of the sky which bordered all. She would understand, he was very sure, what it must mean to a man to give up all this and start life afresh in a distant land among a strange, new people.

It was indeed a great honor to be numbered among the company's stockholders and to be named as their business representative in the southern city toward which he was traveling.

Boynton tossed his magazine aside and stared gloomily out of the window. The train would go rushing on like this, eating up the miles between, until a certain station would be called; then the girl opposite would arise and smilingly pass out of his life forever.

And she was so different—oh, so ideally different—from any woman he had ever known.

"If you please," said a voice, a low sweet voice, "may I take your magazine for a few moments? I would like to see that story."

"Take it!" he answered heartily. "Well, I rather guess you can! You won't care for the story, though," he added.

"No!" The girl smiled up at him. "Is it such a poor story?"

"Poor," he exclaimed disgustedly. "Talk of fiction; there's where you get it. I wonder the magazines publish Henry Hobbs' twaddle. This thing is one of the worst he has ever done. Couldn't possibly happen and wouldn't interest any one if it could."

"Indeed!" The rising inflection in the soft voice invited further information, and the westerner, swaying unsteadily with the car's motion, slipped into the seat at her side.

"Yes," he continued, "it's awful rot. Couple meet on a railroad train, become acquainted the first mile or two out, fall in love the second and leave the car a few hours later to procure a marriage license." Runs like a moving picture. Now, in the first place, what fellow but an out-and-out chump would ask a girl to marry him in that short space of time, while the girl who would accept wouldn't be worth naming unless, of course," he added laughingly, "they were both just plain footloose."

The girl joined in his laugh merrily. "Well," she said, "perhaps they were. But the illustration is beautiful, don't you think?" She was examining it intently.

"Why," Boynton exclaimed, "it might be a picture of this very car. The girl in the rear seat is like you, too-smart and dark and happy looking. She's a southerner."

His companion nodded. "So am I," he said.

A shadow crossed the man's face. "My home has always been in the far west," he confided. "I'm afraid I'll find myself mighty different when I try to be one of you."

The girl's eyes widened. "From the far west?" she repeated wonderingly. "Oh, I would love to have you tell me what it means to live out there!"

With an almost boyish eagerness he complied with her request, and their laughter rang out often as the train sped on its way. The train came to a very sudden stop presently, with much creaking of wheels and brakes, and the westerner broke off in the midst of an exciting tale to investigate the cause. He returned soon with an assuring nod to the girl.

"Just a little sand slide ahead," he explained, "but we shall be detained an hour or so while they clear the tracks."

"We shall be very late in reaching our destination. I am going to sleep. You must not talk to me any more," she said.

So the big westerner obeyed, and the strong lines of his face softened into

a great tenderness as he sat watching the sleeping girl.

After what seemed an interminable time she looked up at him like a drowsy child.

"Nearly there?" she asked.

He leaned forward tensely. "Yes," he answered, "we are desperately near your journey's end, and I can't stand it any longer. I've simply got to tell you right here and now how much I love you. We haven't known each other long, but my love for you isn't new. It's as old as the beginning of the world, and I do not ask for a return—oh, not yet! By and by, perhaps, when some of my rough edges are rubbed off and when I have grown a little more like other people, then I will dare to ask you most humbly. But now I want you to know that I'm loving you all the time wherever you may be, and if you think that there might be a glorious possibility—some time—that you would be my wife—the big westerner's voice trembled. "Oh, my dear," he whispered. "I would try so hard to be worthy."

The girl stood up before him. Two scarlet spots burned in her cheeks, and her eyes were filled with tears. "You must not talk like that to me," she said severely; "it is so—so absurd." Why, you do not even know my name. We are going into the station now, and my father will be there to meet me, so I will tell it to you." She laughed unsteadily. "I am Henry Hobbs," she said. "Henry Hobbs, do you understand, writer of that—that awful riot? When I spoke to you this morning it was only because I was so anxious to see the illustration of my story. I had been too hurried to stop and buy a copy of the magazine. Then when you spoke of my story so discouragingly I wanted to prove to myself that such an occurrence might actually happen. So I have been leading you on, deliberately trying all day long to persuade you to make love to me. You see now what a horrible, despicable creature I am! But that is not all. I made you talk of western life because I am writing a western story and needed material. You gave me a great deal, oh, a very great deal!"—she caught her breath sharply—"and now I reckon you will not think we are much finer down here than you, Mr. Boynton, with all our southern ways."

The westerner arose and carefully collected her bundles. "The westerner arose and carefully collected her bundles.

You have been welcome to any information I could give," he said slowly, "and I deserved punishment for what I foolishly said about your story. But if it is any satisfaction to you you may know positively that the story is entirely within bounds of reason, for if you had cared for me today as I do care for you this would have been a parallel case."

The girl brushed her hand hastily across her eyes. An old gentleman was coming down the aisle.

"Why, Sylvia, my dear," he cried, "your train has been delayed. We have been most anxious." He turned questioningly to Boynton.

"This, father," the girl said, "is Mr. Robert Boynton from the far west. He has been very kind." She held out her hand to say goodbye; but, taking the proffered hand, the westerner helped her down the steps.

"I am staying over at the Grand hotel until late tomorrow night," he explained.

And as the automobile which bore her homeward turned a corner the girl, looking back with a pang, saw him still standing motionless, a great and strange lonely figure. Even the press of business upon the following day could not banish from his memory the girl's witching, haunting face, and Boynton returned to his hotel at evening, weary and depressed.

"A letter for you, sir," said the clerk at the desk, and Boynton tore open the envelope with a puzzled frown.

"I would like to see you again to ask forgiveness," he read. "Please, will you call tonight?"

The note was signed simply "Sylvia Reynolds" but in print was added the well-known name of Henry Hobbs. A great light overspread the westerner's face.

"Will you tell me the quickest way to Magnolia avenue?" he asked of the clerk at the desk. It was she herself who opened the door, greeting him with outstretched welcoming hands, so lovely in her clinging pink gown that Boynton stood abashed before the bewildering vision.

"You were good to let me come," he said at last, "wonderfully good."

The girl came nearer. "Do you know why I sent for you?" she asked hesitatingly. "It was not to ask forgiveness, because—because you will have nothing to forgive."

Something in the sky upward glance of her dark eyes caused a great hope to spring within him.

"You mean?" he asked tensely. She laughed. It was a tremendous little laugh.

"I have been thinking about my story," she said, "and—and I wanted to tell you that this is a parallel case."

She took hasty refuge behind a tall chair as he rushed toward her.

"And you will marry me?" he cried unbelievingly. A smile switched at the corners of her lips.

"Any man who would ask a girl at such short notice would be an out-and-out chump," she repeated demurely.

"Sylvia!" he groaned.

"And the girl who would accept him," she continued mercilessly, "would not be worth asking."

With a masterful gesture the westerner imprisoned the girl's small restraining hands. There was a long silence.

"Unless," a muffled voice remarked—"unless they were both plain foolish."

She drew back to look up into his adoring face. "I reckon that's it, dear," she added softly. "We're both of us just plain foolish."

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CITIES' SPHERE OF GOVERNMENT

Municipal Ownership in European Countries.

SOME GOOD SUGGESTIONS.

Mayor Fitzgerald of Boston Tells of His Personal Observations in Comparing Conditions Here and Abroad—Germany a Good Example.

The most lasting impression that an American visitor carries away from a tour through the cities of northern Europe is the range of operation of the municipal governments, says Mayor Fitzgerald of Boston. It would seem that the ingenuity of men could hardly devise any measure for the enhancement of beauty, the stimulation of industry and the promotion of safety which has not been conceived and put into practice in some one of the great capitals of Germany, Austria or England.

First of all, the cities are laid out or remodeled upon a unified plan. The streets, public buildings, watercourses and parkways are all related to one another as if charted out in the mind of some great designer. When we enter into the life of the communities we find that all paths lead to one center. It is the city which controls the street railways, the electric lighting service, the gas plants and the docks, and this seems to the continental European and the Briton as natural as that our own municipalities should furnish the water supply.

We find municipal theaters, art galleries, music halls and public auditoriums. Just as in America it is the custom for the city to provide libraries, parks, playgrounds and bathhouses, Municipal slaughter houses, bakeries, pawnshops, savings banks, labor bureaus, restaurants and beer gardens seem to us novelties and perhaps encroachments upon the proper sphere of private enterprise.

Municipal tenements represent an effort of the community to rid itself of the hovels which tend to accumulate misery and vice in all the large cities of the world. Municipal lodging houses put our best efforts in this direction to the blush. The schemes for old age pensions and insurance against accident, sickness and unemployment are familiar to all students of these problems and are further illustrations of the wide-reaching activity of the government abroad.

I do not see how this movement for the expansion of the sphere of government, which has already spread to the United States, can be checked. It is a direct result of the enormous growth of the German cities in the last forty years and an antidote, as it were, to the evils attendant upon the congestion of population in large centers. We in America exhibit a parallel development. More and more our young men tend to leave the farms and drift to the cities, which are also the gathering places of huge colonies of immigrants from Europe. The percentage of our population which lives in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants increases at every census. From a virgin land, abounding in fertile farms, open to settlers, we have become in the last fifty years a comparatively compact and concentrated nationality, and poverty, crime and disease walk hand in hand with wealth and affluence through the streets of our great capitals. Worse than this, disorder and social rebellion are beginning to rear their heads. We can no longer ignore along the smooth path of complacency and must take thought, as the wise leaders of the German empire began to do more than a generation ago, to remove these evils, not by mere palliative measures, but by striking at their roots in the social conditions which breed them.

Whether we can copy all of the German municipal program is a question. The traditions of government in the great European empires, unlike ours, are paternalistic. There have been experiments here in the ownership of public utilities. Cleveland has had her municipal railways. New York owns the greater part of her water front. But in general the political conditions in this country make public ownership an ideal to be approached gradually and through a series of careful experiments.

In Germany a restricted suffrage prevails, and business and professional men hold the balance of power. Heads of departments are in most cases obliged to be experts, and even the mayors are trained for their work and serve for long terms.

We must reconcile ourselves at once to the acceptance of the truth that to a very great extent the success of the European cities is due to the exercise of a sort of police power reflected from the national government and harmonious with the ways of thought and traditional habits of the people, which could not be imported outright into America. There remains, however, a great deal that we can adopt. In the planning of streets, in the laws governing the construction and limitation of the height of buildings, in the methods of education, in the provisions for safety and health and in a thousand and one other ways the various cities of Europe teach us lessons which we should be not only willing but eager to learn.